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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/15): "Israel Has Replaced the Road Map with the Settlement Map."

Main Stories:

-----\$28 Million to West Bank
Settlements

All three dailies lead with the Israeli Cabinet vote yesterday to pump more than \$28 million into West Bank settlements after passing a new "national priority map" that sets priorities for government attention and funding. Palestinian Authority (PA) Presidency spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeinah condemned the decision saying, "The Israeli plan challenges international efforts to revive the peace process."

Independent news outlet Ma'an reports that the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, also condemned the vote saying, "the national priority map presented at the cabinet reveals the extent to which Israel's 'settlement moratorium' is a sham. Instead of making peace its number one priority, Israel continues to prioritize settlements and the relentless colonization of occupied Palestinian land, rendering the two-state solution politically and economically unviable."

Fatah Revolutionary Council Meeting

Dailies front page news that the Fatah Revolutionary Council held an

emergency session on Sunday, December 13 in Ramallah, to discuss the latest Palestinian political developments as well as presidential and legislative elections and in preparation for the Fatah Central Council Meeting which starts on Tuesday. President Abbas and most of the Fatah Central Committee members attended the meeting. During the meeting, Abbas stressed that negotiations won't be resumed unless Israel abides by the Road Map.

Fatah Central Council Meeting

Fatah Central Council will convene tomorrow, Tuesday, December 15 and will last three days. The main topic under consideration is extending the terms of President Abbas and all PA bodies until the next elections are held.

The Council will agree to hold elections in June based on the Egyptian proposal. It will also support President Abbas' position regarding the resumption of negotiations with the Israelis and will agree on a plan to discuss the issue of borders at the UNSC.

Yasuf Mosque

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Dailies front page photos of PA Prime Minister Fayyad's visit yesterday to the mosque in Yasuf, which was attacked by settlers last Friday. Fayyad promised that the mosque will be repaired immediately and ready for next Friday's prayers. Fayyad reiterated that the settlers attack proves the Palestinian people's need for international protection.

Prisoner Swap/ National Reconciliation

Citing Israeli daily Maariv, dailies report that President Abbas urged Netanyahu to pursue the prisoner swap deal and to release Palestinian prisoners that are serving long terms. According to coverage, the message was conveyed through a third party and was aimed at verifying the PA position on the deal and to counter Hamas' claims that Abbas is obstructing the deal.

Independent daily Al-Quds front pages comments by Nabil Shaath, member of Fatah central committee, that the national reconciliation efforts have reached dead end due to Hamas' insistence not to sign the Egyptian proposal and that the priority for Hamas now is a successful conclusion to the prisoner exchange deal.

EU statement

Independent daily Al-Quds front pages an exclusive interview with French Consul General in Jerusalem who defended the French position regarding the EU statement calling for Jerusalem to be a capital for two countries.

BLOCK QUOTES:

Al-Quds runs an editorial entitled "Settlement Priority Map" which calls on the international community to take a clear position regarding the Israeli announcement of allocating more funds to national priority settlements. According to the writer, "Israel has replaced the Road Map with the Settlement Map."

Weekend Stories:

Sunday, December 13

Palestinian Desire for Independence Will Not Waiver

All three dailies front page Prime Minister Fayyad's remarks at a
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national conference promoting popular action in confronting settlement activities and the Separation Wall. Fayyad said that the will of the Palestinian people and its leadership to achieve freedom, independence, and protect the future of the peace in the region has not and will not weaken or waiver regardless of barbaric acts by settlements and settlers. Fayyad emphasized that the way to end occupation and establish a state "...lies in building and accumulating...achievements over time" and reflects the awareness of Palestinians to formulate priorities in the framework of national goals. He called on the international community to assume its responsibility to end the "longest occupation in modern history and guarantee the right of Palestinian people to self-determination, to establish the independent state on the 1967 borders with its capital Al Quds Al Sharif by implementing relevant international resolutions."

New U.S. Initiative to Re-launch Negotiations

Al Ayyam front pages a report by London-based Al Hayat newspaper that cites well-informed sources saying that the American administration is preparing to launch a new initiative to resume Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. According to the report, a team of American experts in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, including both Senator George Mitchell and Mr. Dennis Ross, and others are working on the new initiative. The sources indicated that the initiative is based on two main elements: 1) Define the terms of reference for the peace process, and 2) Define the objective and function of the negotiations. The terms of reference are said to be the international resolutions that recognize the two-state solution on the 4th of June 1967 borders, including the land swamp option. According to the sources, the initiative is being designed to try to satisfy both sides.

Yasuf Mosque

Al Hayat Al Jadida front pages the U.S. condemnation of the attack on the mosque in Yasuf. Al Quds runs a story in its inside pages. Both quote the press statement issued by the Consulate condemning "in the strongest terms the attack of Yasuf mosque" and calling for the perpetrators to be brought for justice. The articles report that the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Jordan also condemned the attack and the vandalism committed by settlers. A Jordanian official characterized the attack as "a blatant violation of the freedom of worship."

Prisoner Swap

Al Quds front pages the denial by Egyptian diplomatic sources that a date has been set for concluding the prisoner swap. According to

the reports, the sources told the Lebanese Al Liwa newspaper that discussions continue and are being carried out by Egypt and Germany. Although some minor obstacles exist, they aren't expected to affect the deal and the sources believe the swap would be completed within the next two weeks.

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Fatah Revolutionary Council

Dailies report that according to Fahmi Za'areer, official spokesperson for the Fatah movement and member of the movement's Revolutionary Council, the Council will convene Sunday in an extraordinary meeting of all its members to discuss the political changes that have transpired since Abbas announced he will not seek reelection and the implications of that decision. Za'areer noted that the Council will discuss the positions of the international community towards requesting the U.N. Security Council to demarcate the borders of the Palestinian state on the lands occupied in 1967. The Council will also discuss the recent statement issued by the EU, the Israeli position on negotiations, internal reconciliation efforts and elections in the lead up to the Central Council which will begin on Tuesday, December 15.

Saturday, December 12

Yasuf Mosque

The major story in all the dailies was the settler attack on the mosque in Yasuf Friday before morning prayers and the overall escalation of settler attacks against Palestinians and Palestinian-owned property. Abbas and Palestinian officials condemned the attack and considered it a violation of the freedom of worship and sanctity of holy places. According to reports, the fire destroyed the mosque's library, which contained copies of the Quran and other religious books, and the mosque's carpets, before residents were able to get it under control. The attackers wrote slogans in Hebrew including "Revenge to Banar Ivy" and "We will burn you all." Abdel Rahim Musleh, head of Yassuf village council, told reporters that the settlers involved in the attack snuck into the village around four o'clock on Friday morning and destroyed the doors of the new Hassan Khader mosque in the village's center, pouring petrol inside it and setting the place on fire. Musleh described the attack as a "grave crime" pointing out that settlers from Tapuh settlement, built on the lands of Yassouf, carry out attacks against the village, its residents, and their properties on a daily basis. He called upon the PA to create committees to guard the villages and prevent a repetition of similar attacks.

Anti-Wall Protests Lead to Injuries

In another incident the dailies reported that scores of protestors were injured, by live ammunition and rubber coated steel bullets, and suffered severe suffocation during weekly anti-Wall protests in the villages of Ni'lin and Bil'in.

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East Jerusalem

Dailies reported that about 150 peaceful demonstrators marched in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem carrying banners demanding that Israeli settlers leave the neighbourhood and that Palestinian residents be allowed to return to homes they were forced to leave by Israeli authorities. Eye-witnesses reported that "the police arrested around 20 protestors after deploying special masked units of officers who sprayed gas on the protestors who resisted arrest."

Municipality's Reaction to Shared Capital

Al Quds front pages that the Jerusalem Municipality will seek to strengthen its presence and effectiveness in East Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Swedish initiative proposing Jerusalem as the capital for the two states. The Municipality's leadership convened an emergency meeting to develop a plan to counter the EU statement including doubling efforts to remove Palestinian street vendors, dispatching more police staff to monitor areas where cars are parked and allocating additional staff to oversee construction activities. According to reports by the Israeli weekly newspaper 'Yerushaliym,' David Hidry, one of the municipality's deputy Mayors, recommended that the municipality pressure merchants in East Jerusalem to include on their shop signs in Hebrew.

Settlement Moratorium

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page comments by Beny Begin, a minister in the Likud ruling party in Israel during a radio interview that the moratorium was not intended to freeze life in the settlements but rather to impose some limits on construction in the West Bank. He stated that "over the next 10 months, an additional ten thousand settlers will join the current 300,000 settlers living there now." Mark Regev, spokesperson for the GOI, did not comment on Begin's statements, responding that the announced freeze of construction works remained valid. Begin, who represents the extremist wing of the Likud Party headed by Prime Minister Netanyahu, is one of the ministerial committee members assigned the task of overseeing and implementing the decision to freeze settlement activities.

National Reconciliation

Al Ayyam front pages a recent press roundtable with Prime Minister Fayyad in which he said that "the occupation will not end and the state will not be established as long as we remain in a state of division." In his opinion, "we have never been closer to the possibility of agreeing...on what is necessary and important for us to have a unified Palestinian position as we have done today." During the meeting Fayyad expressed the belief that "the next few days will witness the dissipation of all doubts regarding the Palestinian political regime and its ability to remain and continue dealing with the current situation."

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